



HUGUENIN, my friend—the man of Art and thrills and impulses,—the finished *boulevardier*, the *persifleur*—must, I concluded with certainty, be frenzied. So, at least, I reasoned when, after long years of silence, I received from him this letter:—

“*Sdili*,’ my friend ; that is the name by which they now call this ancient Delos. Wherefore has it been written, ‘so passeth the glory of the world.’

“Ah ! but to me it is—as to *her* it was—still Delos, the Sacred Island, the birthplace of Apollo, son of Leto ! On the summit of Cynthus I look from my dwelling, and within the wide reach of the Cyclades perceive even yet the fruity offerings

arriving from Syria, from Sicily, from Egypt ; I see the barks that bring the sacred envoys of Pan-Ionium to festival—I note the flutter of their hallowed garments—on the breeze once more floats to me their ‘Songs of Deliverance.’

“The island now belongs almost entirely to me. I am, too, almost its sole inhabitant. It is, you know, only four miles long, and half as broad, and I have purchased every available foot of its surface. On the flat top of the granite Cynthus I live, and here, my friend, shall I die. Chains more inexorable and horrible than any which the limbs of Prometheus ever knew bind me to this crag.

“A friend ! a friend ! That is the thing after which my sick spirit pants. A *living man* : of the dead I have enough ; of living monsters, ah, too much ! An aged servant or two, who seem persistently to shun me—this is all I possess of human fellowship. Would that I dared to ask you, an old companion, to come to the solace of a sinking man in this place of desolation !”

The letter continued long in this strain of mingled rhapsody and despair, containing, moreover, a lengthy disquisition on the Pythagorean doctrine of the metempsychosis of the soul. Three times did the words “living monsters” occur. Such a communication, coming from *him*, did not fail to excite my utmost curiosity and pity.

From London to Delos is no inconsiderable journey ; yet, conquered during the course of a long vacation by an irresistible impulse, and the fond memories of other

days, I actually found myself, on a starry night, disembarking on the sands that bound the once famous harbour of the tiny Greek island. My arrival may be dated by the fact that it fell out just two months before the very extraordinary natural phenomena of which Delos was the scene during the night of August 13th, 1880. I crossed the ring of flat land which nearly encircles the islet, and began the ascent of the central mountain. The slumberous air languished with the wild breath of rose and jessamine and almond ; the pipe of the cicada and the gleam of the firefly were not wanting to add to the narcotic charms of this land of dreams. In less than an hour I walked into a tangled garden, and placed my hand on the shoulder of a tall, stooping man, dressed in Attic attire, who walked solitary under the trees.

With a fearful start he turned and faced me.

"Oh," he said, panting, and placing both his hands upon his chest, "I was greatly surprised ! My heart——"

He could utter no more. It was Huguenin, and yet not he. The heavy beard rolling down his white woollen garments was, I could see, still black as ever ; but the masses of unkempt hair which floated with every zephyr about his face and neck were bleached to the whiteness of snow. He stared at me through the dull and cavernous eyes of a man long dead.

We walked into the house together. The mere sight of the building was enough to convince me that in some mysterious way, to some morbid degree, the Past had fettered and darkened the intellect of my friend. The mansion was of the purely Hellenic type, but nothing less than inconceivable in extent—a wilderness rather than a habitation. I found myself in an ancient Greek house—only, a Greek house multiplied many times over into an endless, continuous congeries of Greek houses. It consisted of a single story, though here and there on the vast flat roof there rose a second layer of apartments. These latter were reached by ladders. We walked through a door—opening inwards—into a passage, which in turn led us to an oblong marble court-yard ; this was the *aule*, surrounded by Corinthian pillars, and having in the centre an altar of stone to *Zeus Herkeios*. Around this court on every hand was ranged a series of halls, chambers, *thalamoi*, hung with rich velvets ; and the whole mighty house—made up of a hundred and a hundred reproductions of such court-yards with their surrounding chambers—formed a trackless desert of rooms, through whose uniform labyrinths the most cunning would assuredly fail to find his way.

"This building," said Huguenin to me, some days after my arrival, "this building—every stone, plank, drapery of it—was the creation of my wife's wild and restless fancy."

I stared at him.

"You doubt that I have, or had, a wife ? Come, then, with me ; you shall—you shall—see her face."

He led the way through the dark and windowless house, lighted throughout the day and night by the dim purple radiance shed from many small, open lamps of earthenware filled with the fragrant *nardinum*, an oil pressed from the flower of the Arabian grass *nardus*.

I followed the emaciated figure of Huguenin through a great number of the gloomy chambers. As he moved slowly forward, visibly panting, I noticed that he kept his form bent downward, seeming to seek for something ; and this something I soon found to be a scarlet thread, laid down to afford guidance for the feet through the mazes of the house, and running along the black floor. Suddenly he stopped before the door of one of the apartments called *amphithalamoi*, and, himself remaining without, motioned to me to enter.

I am not a man of what might be called "a tremulous diathesis," yet not without

a tremor did I glance round the room. For a time I could discern nothing under the sombre glimmer radiated from a single *lampas* pendent from wrought brazen chains. But at length a great painting in oils, unframed, occupying nearly one whole side of the chamber, grew upon my sight. It was the picture of a woman. My heart throbbed with a most strange, deep excitement as I gazed upon her lineaments.

She stood erect, robed in a flowing, crimson, embroidered *peplos*, with head slightly thrown back, and one hand and arm pointing stiffly outward and upward. The countenance was not merely Grecian—ancient Grecian, as distinct from modern—but it was so in a highly exaggerated and unlikelike degree. Was the woman, I asked myself, more lovely than ever mortal was before—or more hideous? She was the one or the other, or both; but the riddle baffled me. The Lamia of Keats arose before me—that “shape of gorgeous hue, vermilion-spotted, golden, green and blue.” A hardly-breathing surprise of eyes held me fixed as the image slowly took possession of my vision. Here, then, I muttered, was the Gorgon’s head, whose hair was serpents and her eye a basilisk’s; and as I so thought, I reflected, too, on the myth of how from the dripping blood of Medusa’s head strange creatures sprang to life; and then, with a shuddering abhorrence, I remembered Huguenin’s childish ravings about “monsters.” I drew nearer, in order to analyse the impression almost of dread wrought upon me, and I quickly found—or thought I found—the key. It lay, surely, in the woman’s eyes. They were the very eyes of the tiger: circular, green, large, with glittering yellow radii. I hurried from the room.

“You have seen her?” asked Huguenin, with a cunning, eager distortion of his ashen face.

“Yes, Huguenin, I have seen her. She is very beautiful.”

“She painted it herself,” he said in a whisper.

“Really!”

“She considered herself—she *was*—the greatest painter who has lived since Apelles.”

“But now—where is she now?”

He brought his lips quite close to my ear.

“She is dead. You, at any rate, would call her so.”

This ambiguity appeared to me only the more singular when I discovered that it was his habit, at stated intervals, to make regular and stealthy visits to distant parts of the dwelling. Our bed-chambers being contiguous, I could not fail, as time passed, to notice that he would rise in the dead of night, when he supposed me asleep, and gathering together the fragments of our last meal, depart rapidly and silently with them through the dim and vast house, led always in one particular direction by the scarlet thread of silk which ran along the floor.

I now set myself strenuously to the study of Huguenin. The nature of his physical malady, at least, was clear. He laboured under the singular affection to which physicians have given the name of Cheyne Stoke’s Respiration, the disease manifesting itself at intervals by compelling him to lie back in a perfect agony of inhalation, and groan for air; the bones of his cheeks seemed on the point of appearing through their sere wrapping of mummy-skin; the *ala* of his nose never rested from an extravagance of expansion and retraction. But even this ruin of a body might, I considered, be made partially whole, were it not that to lull the rage and fever of such a *mind* the world contained no anodyne. For one thing, a most curious belief in some unnamed fate hanging over the island on which he lived haunted him. Again and again he recalled to me all that in the long past had been written about Delos: the strange notion contained both in the Homeric and the Alexandrian hymns to the Delian Apollo that the island was *floating*; or that

it was merely secured by chains ; or that it had only been thrown up from the deeps as a temporary resting-place for Ortygia in her travail ; or that it might *sink* before the spurning foot of the new-born god. He was never tired, through long hours, of pursuing, as if in soliloquy, a kind of somnolent, mystical exegesis of such passages as we read together. "Do you know," he said, "that the ancients really supposed the streams of Delos to rise and fall with the rise and fall of the Nile ? Could anything point more clearly to a belief in the extraordinary nature of the island, its far-reaching volcanic affinities, occult geologic eccentricities ?" Often would he repeat the punning hexameter line of the very ancient Sibylline prophecy—

*ἴσται καὶ Σάμος ἄμμος ἐσείται Δῆλος ἀδελος ; **

often, too, having repeated it, he would strike from the repining chords of an Æolian lyre the air of a threnody which, as he told me, his wife had composed to suit the verse ; and when to the funeral wail of this dirge—so wild, so mournful, that I could never hear it without a shudder—Huguenin added the melancholy note of his now hollow and plaintive voice, the intensity of effect produced on me reached the intolerable degree, and I was glad of the dubious and pallid and purple gloaming of the mansion, which partially hid my face from him.

"Observe, however," he added one day, "the meaning of the implied epithet 'far-seen' as applied to Delos : it means 'glorious,' 'illustrious'—far-seen to the spiritual rather than to the bodily eye, for the island is not very mountainous. The words 'sink from sight' must therefore be supposed to have the corresponding significance of an extinction of this glory. And now judge whether or no this prophecy has not been already fulfilled, when I tell you that this sacrosanct land, which no dog's foot was once allowed to touch, on which no man was permitted to be born or to die, bears at this moment on its bosom a monster fouler than the brain of demon ever conceived. A fearful literal and physical fulfilment of the prophecy cannot, I consider, be far distant."

That all this esotericism was not native to Huguenin I was certain. His mind, I was convinced, had been ploughed into by some tremendous energy, before ever this rank growth had choked it. I drew him on, little by little, to speak of his wife.

She was, he told me, of a very antique Athenian family, which by constant effort had conserved its purity of blood. It was while passing southward through Greece in a world-weary mood, some years before my visit, that he came one night to the village of Castri ; and there, on the site of the ancient Delphi, in the centre of an angry crowd of Greeks and Turks, who threatened to rend her to pieces, he first saw Andromeda, his wife. "This incredible courage," he said, "this vast originality was hers, to take upon herself the part of a modern Hypatia—to venture on the task of the bringing back of the gods, in the midst of a fanatical people, at the latter end of a century like the present. The furious mob from which I rescued her was standing around her in front of the vestibule of a just completed temple to Apollo, whose worship she was then and there attempting to restore."

The love of the woman fastened on her preserver with passionate intensity. Huguenin felt himself constrained by the impulse of an irresistible Will. They were united, and came at her bidding to live in the grey abode of her creation at Delos. In this solitude, under this shadow, the man and the woman faced each other. As the months passed the husband found that he had married a seer of visions and a dreamer of dreams. And visions of what hue ! and dreams of what madness ! He confessed to me that he was greatly awed by her, and with this awe was blended a feeling which, if it was not fear, was akin to fear. That he loved her

* "And Samos shall be sand, and Delos (the far-seen) sink from sight."



"Like a rapt, delirious Pythoness."

not at all he now knew, while the excess of her passion for him he grew to regard with the hate which men feel for the distilled elixir of the hemlock. Yet his mind inevitably took on the lurid hue of hers. He drank in unfailingly all her creeds. He followed her in the same way that a satellite follows a world. When for days together she hid herself from him and disappeared, he would wander desolate and full of search over the pathless house. Finding that she habitually yielded her body to the lotus delights of certain opiate seeds produced on the island, he found the courage to frown and warn, and ended by himself becoming a bond-slave to the drowsy *ganja* of India. So too with the most strange fascination she exercised over the animal world: he disliked it—he dreaded it; regarded it as excessive and unnatural; but he looked on only with the furtive, pale eye of suspicion, and said nothing. When she walked she was accompanied by a long magnetised *queue* of living things, felines in particular, and birds of large size. Dogs, on the contrary, shunned her, bristling. She had brought with her from the mainland a collection of these followers, of which Huguenin had never seen the half; they were imprisoned in unknown nooks of the building; ever and anon she would vanish from the house, to reappear with new companions. Her kindness to these dumb creatures should, I presume, have been amply sufficient to account for her power over them; but Huguenin's mind, already grown morbid, probed darkly after some other explanation. The primary *motif* of this unquietness doubtless lay in his wife's fanaticism on the subject of the Pythagorean theory of the transmigration of souls. On this theme Andromeda, it was clear, was violently deranged. She would stand, he declared, with outstretched arm, with eye wild-staring, with rigid body, and in a rapid, guttural recitative—like a rapt, delirious Pythoness—would prophesy of the eternal mutations prepared for the spirit of man. She would dwell, above all, with a kind of contempt, on the limitations of animal forms in the actual world, and would indignantly insist that the spirit of an extraordinary and original man, disembodied, *should and must* re-embody itself in a correspondingly extraordinary and original form. "And," she would often add, "such forms do really exist on the earth, but the God, willing to save the race from frenzy, hides them from the eyes of common men."

It was long, however, before I could induce Huguenin to speak of the final catastrophe of his singular wedded life. He related it in these words:—

"You now know that Andromeda was among the great painters of the world—you have seen her picture of herself. One day, after dilating, as was her wont, on the narrow limitation of forms, she said suddenly, 'But you, too, shall be of the initiated: come, come, you shall see *something*.' She went swiftly forward, beckoning, looking back repeatedly to smile on me a loving patronage, with the condescension of a priestess to a neophyte; I followed, till before a lately finished painting she stopped, pointing. I will not attempt—the attempt would be folly—to tell you what thing of horror and madness I saw before me on the canvas; nor can I explain in words the tempest of anger, of loathing and disgust, that stirred within me at the sight. Kindled by the blasphemy of her fancy, I raised my hand to strike her head; and to this hour I know not if I struck her. My hand, it is true, felt the sensation of contact with something soft and yielding; but the blow, if blow there were, was surely too slight to harm the frame of a creature far feebler than the human. Yet she fell; the film of coming death grew over her dull, upbraiding eyes; one last word only she spoke, pointing to the Uncleaness: 'In the flesh you may yet behold it!' and so, still pointing, pointing, she passed away.

"I bore her body, embalmed in the Greek manner by an expert of Corinth, to one of the smaller apartments on the roof of the house. I saw, as I turned to leave her in the gloom of the strait and lonely chamber, the mortal smile on her

waxen face within the open coffin. Two weeks later I went again to visit her. My friend, she had vanished utterly—save that the bones remained; and from the vacant coffin, above the now fleshless skull, two eyes—living—the very eyes of Andromeda's soul, but full of a new-born, intenser light—the eyes, too, of the pictured horror whose whole form I now discerned in the darkness—gleamed out upon me. I slammed to the door, and fainted on the floor."

"The suggestion," I said, "which you seem to wish to convey is that of a transition of forms from the human to the animal; but, surely, the explanation that the monster, brought secretly by your wife into the house, imprisoned unawares by you with the dead, and maddened by hunger, fed on the uncovered body, is, if not less horrible, at least less improbable."

He looked doubtfully at me for a moment, and then replied: "There was no monster imprisoned with the dead. Be not rash with 'explanations.' You do not require me to tell you, what you must know, that there are many more things in earth—to say nothing of heaven—than were ever dreamt of in your philosophy."

But at least, I urged, he would see the necessity of flying from that place. He answered with the extraordinary avowal that it was no longer doubtful to him, from the effect which any neglect to minister to the creature's wants produced on his own bodily health, that his life was intimately bound up with the life of the being he stayed to maintain; that with the *second* murder of which he should be guilty—nay, with the very attempt to commit it, as, for example, by flight from the house—his own life would inevitably be forfeited.

I accordingly formed the resolution to work the deliverance of my friend in spite of himself. Two months had now passed; the end of my visit was drawing near; yet his maladies of brain and body were not alleviated. It tortured me to think of leaving him once more alone, a prey to the manias which distracted him.

That very day, while he slept his damp, unquiet, opiate slumbers, I started out on the track indicated by the scarlet thread. So far it led—and the rooms through which it passed were of such uniformity, and the path so serpentine, and the sameness of construction on every hand so unbroken—that I could not doubt but that, the clue once snapped at any point, the journey to the desired end could be accomplished only by the most improbable good fortune. I followed the thread to its termination: it stopped at the foot of a ladder-like stair, which I ascended. At the top of the stair, and close to it, I was faced by a narrow wall, in which was a closed wooden door; in the door a hole large enough to admit the hand. As I placed my foot on the topmost step, a long, low, plaintive whine, with a sickening likeness to a human wail, broke upon my ear.

I hurriedly descended the steps. Some little distance from them I broke the silken thread, and, gathering it up in my hand as I went, again broke it near the region of the house which we occupied.

"Hereby," I said, as I held the gathered portion to the flame of a lamp, "shall a soul be saved alive."

I watched him later on through half-closed lids, as he departed, haggard and shivering, on his nightly errand. My heart throbbed under an agony of disquiet while I awaited his long-delayed return.

He came swiftly and softly into my room, and shook me by the shoulder. On his face was a look of unusual calmness, of dignity and mystery.

"Wake up," he said. "I wish you—I am a sorry host, am I not?—I wish you to leave me to-night, at once; to leave the island—*now*."

"But tell me——" I gasped.

"Nay, nay; I will take no refusal. Trust me this once, and go. There is a

danger here. Destiny is against me—an impudent destiny, careless even to conceal its hand. Go. One or two of the fisher-folk of the harbour will convey you over to Rhenea before the morning light, and you will be saved.”

“But saved from what?”

“From what? I cannot tell you: from the destiny, whatever it be, which awaits me. Do you know—can you dream—that the thread on which my life depends is *snapped*?”

“But suppose I tell you——”

“You can tell me nothing. Ah you hear that?”

He held up his hand and listened. It was a sudden shriek of the wind around the house.

“It is but the rising wind,” I muttered, starting up.

“Ah, but that—that which followed. Did you not *feel* it?”

“Huguenin, I felt nothing.”

He had clasped with both arms a marble pillar, against which his forehead rested, while with one foot he gently and mechanically patted the floor. In this posture, now utterly demoralised and craven, he remained for some minutes. The wail of the wind was heard at intervals. Suddenly he turned towards me, with a ghastly face and the scream of a frightened woman.

“Now—now at least—*you feel it!*”

I could no longer deny. It was as if the whole island had gently rocked to and fro on a pivot.

Thoroughly unnerved myself, trembling more with awe than with terror, I seized Huguenin's arm, and sought to draw him from the pillar, which, muttering low, he still embraced. He sullenly refused to stir; and I, resolved in any event to stay by him, sat near. The seismic agitation increased. But he seemed to take no further note of anything,—only, with the regularity of a clock's oscillations, the tripudary automatic motion of his foot persisted. In this way an hour, two hours, passed. At the end of that time the rocking movement of the earth had become intense, rapid and continuous.

There came a moment when, overwhelmed by a new panic, I sprang to my feet and shook him.

“Headstrong man!” I cried, “have you then parted with every sense? Do you not smell—can you not feel—that the house is in flames?”

His eyes, which had grown dark and dull, blazed up instantly with a new madness.

“Then,” he shouted, with the roar of a clarion,—“then she shall—I say she *shall* be saved! The cheetah—the feathered cheetah!”

Before I could lay hold of the now foaming maniac, he had dashed past me into a corridor. I followed behind in hottest pursuit. The carpets and hangings, as yet but dully glowing, filled the passages with the smoke of Tophet. I hoped that Huguenin, weak of lung, would fall choked and exhausted. Some power seemed to lend him strength—he rushed onward like the wind; some sure, mysterious instinct seemed to guide him—not once did he falter or hesitate.

The long chase through the cracking house, burning now on every side, was over. The just intuitions of insanity had not failed the madman—he reached the goal for which he panted. I saw him hasten up the half-consumed ladder, whose foot was already in a lake of flame. He rushed to the smouldering wooden door of the tomb of Andromeda, and tore it wide open. And now from out the vault there burst—above the roaring of the fire, and the whistle of the tempest, and the thousandfold rattle of the earthquake—a shrill and raucous shriek, which turned my blood to ice;

and I saw proceeding from the darkness a creature whose native loathsomeness human language has no vocabulary to describe. For if I say that it was a cheetah—of very large size—its eyes a yellow liquid conflagration—its fat and boneless body swathed in a thick panoply of dark grey feathers, vermillion-tipped—with a similitude of miniature wings on its back—with a wide, vast, downward-sweeping tail like the tail of a bird of paradise,—how by such words can I image forth all the retching nausea, all the bottomless hate and fear, with which I looked? The fire, it was evident, had already reached the body of the beast; already it flamed. I saw it fly, rather than spring, at Huguenin's head; the burial of its fangs in his flesh, the meeting of its teeth about his windpipe, I saw. He tottered—gurgling—tearing at the feathery horror—backward over the spot where a moment before the stair had stood; together they fell into the sea of flame beneath.

I ran in headlong haste from the house, discovering by good chance an egress. The night was clear, yet all the winds seemed to tumble in disenchained ecstasy about the islet. As I descended I noted the scathed and scorched aspect of the trees and of certain of the rocks; at one spot a multitude of deep, smooth, conical openings, edged with grey, glowing scoriæ, riveted my attention. Still lower, I stood on a bluff promontory and looked sheer into the sea. The sight was sublime and appalling. The deep—without billow or foam or ripple—luminous far down with phosphorescences—rushed, like some lambent lamina yoked to the fiery steeds of Diomedes, with a steady, intense, almost dazzling impetuosity towards the island. Delos, indeed, seemed to *float*—to swim, painfully struggling, like a little doomed bird, against the all-engulfing element. I passed with the earliest light from this mystic shrine of ancient piety. Among the last sights that greeted my gaze was the still ascending reek of the blighted and accursed dwelling of Huguenin.

M. P. SHIEL.

